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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Dangers of Forages

I have talked about the dangers of grazing forages like Sorghum Sudangrass and Johnsongrass after a light frost and especially when it shorter than 18 inches. I have had several people tell me that they had never heard of some of this before. Recently I read an post in the Beef Blog from a county agent in Kentucky that addresses this situation for Johnsongrass. With the past couple of months being dry, pastures have gotten short in many areas and some may have moved livestock onto fields that are normally used as hayfields. Use caution in the coming weeks if Johnsongrass is present. As you will read below it will be safer later on. Maybe feeding hay now could be an option.

We have started to see temperatures decreasing at night, and we have seen the first frost of the fall. In some places, there is a lot of Johnsongrass in pastures and hayfields, and that brings up concerns for cattle producers. That is because Johnsongrass contains cyanic compounds which, under certain stresses, can result in cyanide poisoning when consumed by beef cattle.

Beef cattle producers should be aware of the potential issues with Johnsongrass following a frost, and keep them in mind when managing the herd. Cyanide poisoning is a concern with Johnsongrass following a frost because the species contains cyanogenic compounds that produce free cyanide gas when the plant cells rupture after a frost event. When damaged Johnsongrass is consumed, the cyanide can be absorbed into the blood stream and result in cyanide poisoning. Cyanide is a gas, so it dissipates as the plant dries during hay curing, or during the ensiling process.

As a general rule of thumb, the highest potential risk of cyanide poisoning of beef cattle from grazing Johnsongrass comes when it is grazed following a light frost. Grazing young, leafy growth has the highest potential for cyanide poisoning. Grazing old stemmy, mature growth still carries a risk, but it is lower. This means grazing the regrowth of hay fields harvested more recently will pose the highest risk.

Chopping fields with a lot of Johnsongrass for silage can pose a risk as well if they are being fed as “green chop.” When properly ensiled, the risk of cyanide poisoning is greatly reduced. The risk of cyanide poisoning can also be greatly reduced when grazing of Johnsongrass is delayed until the plant material is completely dead following a heavy frost. There is little risk of cyanide poisoning for beef cattle when they are fed Johnsongrass hay that has been adequately cured before being rolled or baled.

Following a light frost that doesn’t completely kill Johnsongrass in the field, waiting at least two weeks without any additional frost events is recommended. Following a killing frost, fields can be grazed as soon as the Johnsongrass plants are dead and dried up.

Harvesting Johnsongrass hay is OK as long it is cured adequately. Never feed green chop that contains Johnsongrass harvested after a light frost. Instead, let it ensile properly, then it will be safest to feed.

*If you have any questions, or would like additional information about this topic, contact Clay Stamm at the Clark County Extension Service by email at [clay.stamm@uky.edu](mailto:clay.stamm@uky.edu) or call (859) 744-4682. Stamm is the Clark County Cooperative Extension Service agent for agriculture and natural resources.*

## **Great Time to Test**

Fall is a great time to test on the farm. I know most people do not like the idea of any type of test. Medical tests, pesticide tests, or any kind of test. However, sometimes it is necessary to find out what is going on.

The tests that I am referring to is soil tests and forage tests. Soil testing for fertility in the fall is a good idea to make some amendments, like lime, in the fall if it calls for it. Phosphate and Potash can be added in the fall, too.

Other soil tests can be taken in the fall, too. I discussed the opportunity to send in samples for Soybean Cyst Nematode last week. Remember, I have a few bags for SCN testing that will provide a test for FREE.

Forage testing as we get closer to feeding hay for the next few months is recommended. Round bales are fairly easy to pull samples from with a hay probe. Hay probes are available to be used at the OSU Extension Office and Soil and Water Office in Adams County.

The soil fertility test, including shipping is less than \$15 and the forage testing is less than \$25 for the basic test. There are more extensive tests available for both soils and forages for an additional fee.

## **Dates to Remember**

- Nov. 14      First night for Estate Planning program at North Adams High School. Register by Nov. 1 for early bird price. Call 544-2339 to pre-register. The rest of the sessions will be held on December 18, January 16 and February 6. All start at 6:30 p.m.
  
- Nov. 18      Pesticide and Fertilizer Certification Exams for Private and Commercial Applicators at the Old Y Restaurant at noon. Remember for November the exam dates will change to the third Monday of the month due to Veterans Day falling on the second Monday.